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## OFFICER PROMOTION SYSTEM

Some folks have questioned why we force officers to leave the service through our competitive promotion process while we appear to be in a period of growth that places huge demands on accessions. This is a reasonable but complex question.

Our officer promotion system attempts to balance many competing needs. We need to be selective in filling progressively fewer, more senior military billets. We need a reasonably stable and predictable system to maintain desired continuity, experience levels and skill sets. And, we need desirable career progression to attract and retain bright people and develop their potential. Thus, we must constantly balance promotion flow requirements with retention and accession needs. To achieve desired promotion flow, we will always have a competitive promotion process that asked some fine officers to leave due to non-selection so that the talents of other officers coming up in the system can be best employed. This is fundamental to our military workforce that requires career opportunities and high performance. The goal is to identify the best performers with the most desirable skill sets and promote them at each step of the way. The decisions are never easy but the principle has served us well to meet the needs of the Service.

Let me put where we're at today into historical perspective.

In the mid to late 1980's, we went through a period of virtually no growth and experienced increasing time in grade to promotion to lieutenant through captain. Our promotion points were not very competitive with the other armed services although our opportunities of selection were much better. People were unhappy with waiting too long between promotion points so many left the Service. We, in turn, began to gradually make the officer promotion process more competitive with reduced opportunities of selection for promotion and continuation.

In the early to mid 1990's, we went through a similarly highly competitive period as a result of streamlining. Opportunities were about 50% for captain continuation, 60% for captain selection, 70% for commander selection, 80% for lieutenant commander selection, 85% for lieutenant selection, and 75% for reserve officer extension. All this occurred within the context of maintaining a relatively stable overall attrition rate, both voluntary and involuntary, of about 7%.

In the late 1990's, we began to experience a higher rate of voluntary attrition within our more junior officer ranks because the economy was so good. This drove our overall officer attrition rate to about 9%. This was followed by our current period of growth. As a result, we began to gradually increase the opportunities of selection for promotion and continuation. During our most recent promotion cycle, opportunities were about 60% for captain continuation, 66% for captain selection, 83% for commander selection, 87% for lieutenant commander selection, 95% for lieutenant selection, and fully qualified for reserve officer extension. These actions helped us

achieve an overall attrition rate closer to historical norms of around 7% within the officer corps.

We have the same trend of greater opportunity for selection for promotion and continuation within the warrant officer corps.

With the recent passage of the new Coast Guard Authorization bill, we now have the authority to continue lieutenant commanders to 24 years of commissioned service, commanders to 26 years of commissioned service, and captains beyond 30 years of commissioned service. These new tools provide us greater flexibility to meet Service needs and an opportunity for a select few with highly desirable skills to remain on active duty longer. Our new Authorization bill also gives us the authority to move a limited number of the highest performing officers selected for promotion to the top of that year's promotion list. We haven't yet developed the procedural regulations for all these new authorities, but we will in the very near future.

The bottom line is that our officer promotion system takes into consideration performance, retention and accession needs. Selection opportunities for promotion and continuation will continue to be set to maintain optimal levels of stability, predictability, flexibility, and competitive performance. Opportunities will continue to be targeted to address the specific requirements of each paygrade. Being an officer will continue to be both challenging and rewarding, constantly demanding learning and professional growth.

Regards, Ken Venuto



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